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FORUM ON BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND BIOTERRORISM

PLANNING MEETING

April 6, 1999

**National Academy of Sciences Building
Board Room
2100 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.**

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OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
DEVELOPMENT, SECURITY, AND COOPERATION DIVISION

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE
HEALTH SCIENCES POLICY PROGRAM

FORUM ON BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND BIOTERRORISM

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AGENDA

National Academy of Sciences Building
2100 C Street, N.W.
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TUESDAY
APRIL 6, 1999

NAS Board Room

8:30 am Continental Breakfast

9:00 am **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

D.A. Henderson, M.D., M.P.H.
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Planning Meeting Chair

John Boright, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Office of International Affairs

Susanne Stoiber
Executive Officer, Institute of Medicine

9:30	IOM ROUNDTABLES AND FORUMS PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE Andrew Pope, Ph.D. Director, Health Sciences Policy Program
10:00	REVIEW OF TASK, SCOPE, AND FOCUS AREAS Margaret Hamburg, M.D. Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
11:00	POSSIBLE FORUM SPONSORSHIP
12:00 pm	POSSIBLE FORUM MEMBERSHIP Working Lunch
1:00	ADJOURN

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General Information on NRC Roundtables and Forums

Roundtables and forums at the National Research Council (NRC) are an effective mechanism for convening a variety of interest groups for discussions about a particular area of importance. Such activities provide a structured opportunity for regular and open, non-adversarial communication among representatives from academia, industry, citizen groups, other private sector groups, and government (federal members serve in an *ex officio* capacity). Roundtable membership is usually large, often including 20 to 25 individuals from the interested communities. The strength of a roundtable rests on the diversity of its membership and the commitment of its individual members to attend on a regular and continuing basis. Roundtables are recognized by their sponsors and participants as a valuable resource and unique environment for unencumbered discussion. Examples of such activities are the *Forum on Drug Development*; the *Forum on Emerging Infections*; the *Roundtable on AIDS Vaccine and Drug Development*; the *Food Safety Forum*; and the *Forum on the Future of Children and Their Families*.

The purpose is to foster dialogue and discussion across sectors and institutions; the shared objective is to illuminate issues (not necessarily to resolve them) and to advance mutual understanding of emerging issues. Roundtables and forums do not provide advice or recommendations on any policy pending before an agency or organization. However, it has been the experience of the NRC that a number of U.S. government agencies, private sector organizations, and citizen groups have chosen to follow suggestions or avenues of research and thinking raised at a roundtable activities.

An important function of a roundtable is to provide a neutral meeting ground for debate, analysis, and the exchange of information and perspectives on important issues. A roundtable can include individuals who might be considered to have biases or conflicts of interest that would preclude them from participating in studies that result in conclusions and recommendations; for example, it often includes government representatives who usually cannot participate in NRC studies receiving government funding.

A roundtable can choose a variety of activities, or can sometimes develop new methods for achieving its own objectives. Often workshops, conferences, or symposia are held to consider scientific or policy developments, and the resulting debate is useful to those who attend and contribute to the dialogue. Commissioned papers can be produced if resources permit. Summaries of the workshops and conferences are often prepared and disseminated to a wider audience. As mentioned above, such products do not contain recommendations. A roundtable may, however, suggest to the NRC that it consider conducting a more traditional study of a particular topic or area.

Discussions of a roundtable can:

- foster the exchange of information and ideas
- identify areas in need of greater attention
- clarify policy issues by fostering knowledge and identifying points of agreement
- inform decision makers about science and policy issues

A roundtable has the ability to set its own ground rules to a certain extent with regard to such issues as:

- whether a substitute can attend meetings in place of a duly appointed member
- whether liaison members will be permitted and, if so, to what extent they will be invited to participate
- whether to hold any given meeting, workshop, or other activity (or portion thereof) in open or executive session
- what the outcome or product for a particular meeting will be and its format
- how to disseminate any products/information the membership deems necessary

Report Review

Every report prepared by a body of NRC or the Institute of Medicine (IOM) is reviewed by a group other than its authors. This independent review is a hallmark that distinguishes the NRC from many other organizations offering the federal government and other sponsors scientific and technical assistance on important issues. The purpose of review is to assist the authors in making their report as accurate and effective as possible and to assure that both the authoring group and the NRC/IOM are creditably represented by the document published in their names. Experience has demonstrated the positive benefits of careful review in enhancing the clarity and cogency of manuscripts.

Review of reports based on workshops or the proceedings of symposia, convocations, or other sponsored conferences, when they do not contain conclusions and recommendations, are usually overseen by the parent unit rather than by the institution-wide Report Review Committee of the NRC. Such a report should describe the event on which it is based and explicitly indicate that the material presented reflects the views and opinions of those participating in the event and not the deliberations of a study committee.

**National Research Council
Institute of Medicine
National Academy of Sciences**

FORUM ON BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND BIOTERRORISM

Overview and General Information

There are many different ways that activities at the National Research Council (NRC) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) can be designed and conducted, depending on the scope of work, the desirable outcome, and the resources available. In every case the ingredients that remain the same are the use of expert volunteer committees, a neutral venue, assessments and analyses grounded in scientific data, peer review of products, and a commitment to disseminating the findings of our work. Increasingly, NRC/IOM is called upon for both rapid advice and for continuing analysis. Thus, in addition to the “traditional” committee studies of one to three years' duration, NRC/IOM has developed several other ways to offer independent advice and service to the public. Among these is the forum or roundtable type of activity.

General Information on Roundtables and Forums

Some issues are best considered in a forum or roundtable format, where individuals from industry, government, and academia can convene to examine new scientific findings and issues, and their policy ramifications. Such activities provide a neutral convening ground for debate and analysis that is meant to inform, illuminate, and advance mutual understanding of emerging issues.

The forum or roundtable membership is usually large, 20–25 scientists and executives from the interested communities (e.g., government scientists and regulators, industry, academia, foundations). Examples of such activities are the *Forum on Drug Development*; the *Forum on Emerging Infections*; the *Roundtable on AIDS Vaccine and Drug Development*; the *Food Safety Forum*; and the *Forum on the Future of Children and Their Families*.

Often workshops or conferences are conducted in conjunction with a forum or roundtable activity to consider specific scientific or policy developments in greater depth. Summaries of the workshops and conferences are prepared and disseminated to a wide audience, as appropriate.

Forum on Biological Weapons and Bioterrorism

The challenge of bioterrorism is that effectively combating it requires an unprecedented level of cooperation between agencies and organizations, from local to international. The NRC/IOM Forum will provide a structured opportunity for the discussion of emerging issues and the identification of mutual concerns among interested parties. In so doing, the Forum will help

identify opportunities and problems that are current and likely to be ongoing, and those that might arise within the next few years.

The general objectives are:

- to provide a neutral setting for the exchange of information about issues related to biological weapons research and detection,
- to identify and discuss priority public health issues, and
- to explore avenues of cooperation, domestically and internationally, that would strengthen prevention, emergency response, and management.

Although forum activities are not intended as a mechanism for dealing with acute “crisis” situations, the expertise of the forum members could facilitate rapid responses by NRC/IOM through ad hoc study and advisory activities.

The Forum will provide a mechanism for interested parties from the academic, regulatory, industrial, military and other perspectives to meet and discuss sensitive and difficult issues in a neutral setting. The Forum will not provide formal advice or recommendations. The unofficial nature of the deliberations and the neutrality of the setting will facilitate fresh thinking and cooperative problem solving about the new challenges presented by terrorist use of biological weapons.

Membership and Meetings

The Forum membership will be limited to 20–25; members will be chosen for their professional perspective as well as their scientific credentials, and will include, for example, federal researchers, regulators, industry representatives, and academicians. Expertise will include public health, national and international security, emergency response and management, and biological research. Representatives of federal research and regulatory agencies will be appointed by virtue of the position they hold. The Forum will convene in Washington, D.C., under the neutral auspices of NRC/IOM.

Topics and Areas of Emphasis

The Forum agenda topics will be identified by the membership, weighing the interests of all parties, and include issues of interest to the entire membership. Three areas of emphasis are: improving the science base for public health policy and regulatory decision-making, developing a comprehensive system for detection and monitoring of the threat from biological agents, establishing effective and clear methods of communication and cooperation between agencies and countries. Within these three broad areas are many topics worthy of consideration; they range from vaccinating “front-line” healthcare workers, to strengthening international resolve to

effectively monitor biological weapons, to the effect of hoax threats on emergency response and public awareness. The task of the Forum would be to identify and, to some extent, assign priority to these issues, and facilitate communication and cooperation through meetings and workshops.

Workshops

The need for more in-depth and detailed discussions on specific topics is likely to emerge during the course of Forum meetings. To address these topics, the Forum will sponsor at least two workshops a year on topics agreed to by the Forum membership. In selecting workshop topics, the Forum will consider the timeliness of the issues, the amount of information already available on the topic, and whether the Forum can offer additional information or perspectives that would be useful to the discussion of the topic. Speakers would be recruited on the basis of their credentials for the specific topic, as well as for their ability to provide a balanced perspective for the overall workshop.

Suggesting Other Activities

The Forum may identify and suggest topics for other, separate studies within the NAS complex. Any such activity of this nature would be conducted by a separate group within the NAS complex in accordance with the policies and procedures of the NRC.

Product and Dissemination Plan

The Forum will meet at least twice a year and sponsor at least two workshops each year on topics to be determined by the Forum members. The workshops will provide an opportunity to draw in a wider group of additional experts and interested parties than will be normally present at Forum meetings. No reports will be written from the Forum meetings. Workshop summaries will be prepared and distributed, but will not contain recommendations.

The Forum will not provide recommendations on any specific issue or policy pending before any government agency. To allow full and candid participation by all members, the Forum identifies approaches, but does not make specific recommendations or endorse specific courses of action.